

# Smooth sailing for convoy's 'game ball' football

By [Steve Mraz](#), Stars and Stripes  
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CAMP ARIFJAN, Kuwait — The "game ball" is back safely, with another Iraq destination and hundreds of miles behind it.

On its most recent mission, the "game ball" football of Battery B, 1st Battalion, 77th Field Artillery Regiment, out of Fort Sill, Okla., went from Camp Arifjan, Kuwait, to Baghdad International Airport and back during a nearly weeklong convoy.

The ball and, more importantly, the soldiers, completed the mission without injury or incident.

Since the battery arrived in Kuwait in October, the game ball has traveled with its Heavy Equipment Transporter convoys all over Iraq, including Fallujah, Al Asad and Iskandariyah, just to name a few places. Every time the ball visits a new locale, the name of the place is written on it.

"By the end of our year, it should be covered with all the places this battery has gone to," said Staff Sgt. Daniel Bonilla, 26, of Columbus, Ga., who served as convoy commander on the mission to the airport and back.

The convoy left Baghdad International Airport early Friday with trailers bound for Camp Virginia, Kuwait, which it unloaded there before returning to Camp Arifjan. A number of retrograde vehicles also were hauled back to Camp Arifjan. Retrograde is the word used to describe equipment that needs to be removed from the battle zone.

As more U.S. and coalition bases are handed over to the Iraqis, more equipment is being retrograded out of Iraq, which is keeping the convoys busy with retrograde missions. The process is being referred to as the "BRAC (Base Realignment and Closure) of Iraq."

The convoy was set to reach Convoy Support Center Scania in Iraq on Friday morning and rest before continuing on, but no room was available at Scania for the convoy. So the soldiers kept driving south. They finally made it to Camp Cedar II a few hours after sunrise and were in need of some rest.



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**The Battery B, 1st Battalion, 77th Field Artillery Regiment "game ball" successfully made it back to Camp Arifjan, Kuwait, on Saturday after a convoy picked up retrograde equipment from Baghdad International Airport last week and returned to Arifjan.**



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**Staff Sgt. Daniel Bonilla, 26, of Columbus, Ga., tosses the Battery B "game ball" at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait, last week.**

Unfortunately, Camp Cedar II had been invaded by biting gnats that had the soldiers constantly swatting at the pests. After a few hours of rest, they were back on the road and pulling into Camp Navistar in Kuwait near the Iraqi border around nightfall.

After dropping off some trailers at Camp Virginia, Kuwait, and escorting the "white" or contracted civilian trucks in the convoy back to their headquarters, Bonilla was back at Camp Arifjan late Saturday afternoon.

"Mission accomplished," Bonilla said. "All the soldiers made it back safe."

Some of the field artillery soldiers who were turned into truck drivers for this deployment do not mind the change.

"We travel everywhere," said Staff Sgt. William Legg, 30, of Melbourne, Fla. "We get to see all of Iraq. We see the people in the Shiite areas, the people in the Sunni area and how different they are. It's really neat. I'm glad we got tasked with this, actually."

One of the battery's soldiers wants to change his military occupational specialty to become a truck driver.

"I enjoy it," said Spc. John Conner, 22, of Wichita Falls, Texas. "When I'm behind the wheel, I'm in control."

## A heavy job that calls for heavy equipment

Unit tasked with moving machinery from Kuwait into Iraq

By [Steve Mraz](#), Stars and Stripes  
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*Steve Mraz / S&S*

**A HET, or heavy equipment transporter, prepares to continue a convoy to Baghdad International Airport. The massive truck and trailer system boasts 48 wheels and a trailer with rear-wheel steering. It is capable of hauling M1 tanks and some of the military's heaviest equipment.**

BAGHDAD INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT — An armored rig roars down the open road, equipped with a 500-horsepower engine and 48 wheels.

It's part of an imposing convoy headed "up north" from Camp Arifjan, Kuwait.

The soldiers of Battery B, 1st Battalion, 77th Field Artillery Regiment out of Fort Sill, Okla., are driving the Heavy Equipment Transporter, or HET. It's the Barry Bonds of big rigs.

A portion of the battery's 2nd Platoon recently navigated Iraq's dangerous, roadside-bomb-laden highways and made it to Baghdad International Airport without incident or injury.

"I feel a lot safer in these things," said Sgt. Keith Noon, 22, of Tucson, Ariz. "I think it intimidates [the enemy]. I don't think they want to attack such a huge vehicle. Even if they do try it, they know they won't be able to do anything to it."

The converted artillery soldiers have been transporting tanks and an assortment of the military's heaviest equipment into Iraq since 1-77 arrived in October. Their mission is to bring units' equipment into Iraq after it arrives in Kuwait.

The artillery battery is just one of several units that has fallen under the battalion-level Logistics Task Force 28, which arrived in Kuwait in August. The 28th Transportation Battalion, out of Mannheim, Germany, is known as Logistics Task Force 28 during this deployment. Since LTF 28 arrived, soldiers have driven more than 3.5 million miles during convoys.

While the units under LTF 28 are stationed in Kuwait, Lt. Col. Stephen Farmen, LTF 28 commander, said 95 percent of the mission is in Iraq.

"Once you leave the gate and go into Iraq, you don't know what could happen," he said.

The soldiers drove through Kuwait and southern Iraq, stopping at camps along the way for fuel and rest.

But it's not only soldiers who participate in the convoys. Third-country nationals drive "white" or contracted trucks that are interspersed throughout the convoy, which is protected by several Humvees. A mix of Filipinos, Indonesians, Turks and Indians accompanied the military convoy this time and the language barrier didn't seem to be a problem.



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**Pfc. Kenneth Pettigrew, 24, of Morgan Hill, Calif., performs security while his convoys stops on an Iraqi highway because of maintenance issues. Interspersed with military trucks are "white" or contracted trucks driven by third-country nationals.**

#### Road songs

The following is a sample of the some of the music soldiers listen to while on convoy:

"Ride of the Valkyrie" composed by Richard Wagner

"Midnight Wagon" by Insane Clown Posse

"In Between Dreams" album by Jack Johnson

"The Gambler" by Kenny Rogers

"Bombs over Baghdad" by OutKast

"Enter Sandman" by Metallica

As the convoy got closer to Baghdad, the threat of small-arms fire and roadside bombs increased. Before making the last leg of the trip to the airport, one soldier gave some friendly advice, quoting from the movie "Dodgeball."

"If anything happens, remember the five 'D's," he said, jokingly. "Dodge, duck, dive, dip and dodge."

A roadside bomb was located on the main supply route the convoy was traveling Wednesday night. An explosive ordnance disposal team was dispatched to the site, and the convoy was held up for some time.

Just prior to midnight Wednesday, the convoy made it safe and secure to a staging area at Baghdad International Airport — without the need to employ the five D's.

## Bullets, 'ballet': All in a day for 37th Transportation's convoys

By [Steve Mraz](#), Stars and Stripes  
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CAMP ARIFJAN, Kuwait — It's the "Swan Lake" of logistics ballets.

Orchestrating, organizing and tracking as many as 3,050 trucks and 80 convoys a day through Kuwait and Iraq is a task that falls on the brigade-level 37th Transportation Group out of Kaiserslautern, Germany.

The task becomes more complicated by the fact that the convoys are traveling roads notorious for improvised bombs and some are covering distances equivalent to the mileage between Washington, D.C., and Dallas.

So what does it take to pull off the mission when 84 convoys are scattered around Iraq and Kuwait on a single day?

"A lot of delegation and leadership," said Col. Michael H. MacNeil, commander of the 37th Transportation Group. "You have squad leaders leading platoon-size convoys and doing a bang-up job."

From flatbed trucks to the massive Heavy Equipment Transporter, the convoys ferry everything from food and ammunition to tanks into Iraq from Kuwait.

On average, the 37th Transportation Group, known in Germany as the 37th Transportation Command, has 1,700 trucks and 50 convoys on the road each day. Since August, soldiers in units under the 37th Transportation Group have logged almost 35 million miles behind the wheel.



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**Pfc. Kenneth Pettigrew, of 1st Battalion, 77th Field Artillery Regiment, stands on the Iraqi roadside as his convoy is halted because of an accident ahead.**

Being on the road that much exposes the convoys to enemy attack. On average, two attacks occur a day against convoys under command and control of the brigade. Twenty-five percent of the soldiers under the 37th Transportation Group — about 1,400 — have earned their Combat Action Badge.

“They’re out there mixing it up,” MacNeil said. “They’re pretty proud of it.”

On the battalion level, Logistics Task Force 28 out of Mannheim, Germany, currently has two field artillery batteries out of Fort Sill, Okla. — the 1st Battalion, 77th Field Artillery Regiment and the 5th Battalion, 3rd Field Artillery Regiment — underneath it that perform HET missions. At one time, the battalion had six units underneath it with nearly 1,700 soldiers. During this deployment, the 28th Transportation Battalion is known as Logistics Task Force 28.

Units underneath the battalion recently transported equipment for 1st Armored Division troops deploying to Iraq from Kuwait. While the transportation units are based in Kuwait, nearly all of their missions are in Iraq, said Lt. Col. Stephen E. Farmen, commander of LTF 28.

Since the battalion arrived in August, it has been responsible for the movement of more than 16,000 pieces of equipment in support of the war in Iraq.

From late August to early March, convoys under LTF 28 have been attacked more than 90 times. Soldiers in LTF 28 have earned 32 Bronze Stars, 80 Meritorious Service Medals, 15 Purple Hearts and 447 Combat Action Badges.

“We have had our share of valor and wounded in action,” Farmen said.

Missions the convoys complete without attack are not mere coincidence, Farmen said.

“Whenever we have a night that’s quiet, it’s not just dumb luck,” he said. “Our soldiers are doing the right thing to avoid being hit.”